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Area cities, ports ready for stimulus

By John Canalis, Kristopher Hanson and Kevin Butler, Staff Writers

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Government agencies that qualify for portions of the \$787 billion economic stimulus package say they have projects that are ready to go when Congress turns the financial faucet.

Local cities, port authorities, school districts and transit agencies expect to receive aid, but how much depends on formulas similar to those used for other federal disbursements.

The plan does not include congressional earmarks for specific communities or projects.

Instead pools of money will go to specific agencies in general categories, such as housing, jobless benefits, health care, transportation, public safety and the environment.

U.S. Rep. Laura Richardson, D-Long Beach, said the package is designed to expedite funding to get people working - but not at the expense of accountability.

"Congress has committed to involvement, oversight and accountability," she said. "For example, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, on which I serve, will evaluate reporting and implementation requirements. Governors, state, local and school officials, have

committed to ending senseless red tape bureaucracy while prioritizing real needs."

Much of the money, particularly in the way of federal grants, will be disbursed in rough accordance with formulas states and cities use to apply for federal funding on an annual basis.

Aid for Long Beach

Due to Long Beach's population, income and other factors that play into the formulas used in calculating federal grants, the city expects to be in line for a decent amount of stimulus funding, said Tom Modica, the city's government affairs manager.

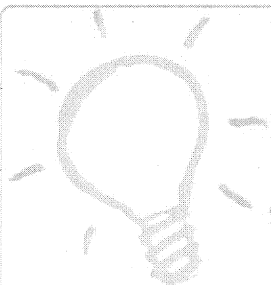
"We're pretty sure there's going to be a lot of different opportunities for the city," Modica said. "Those can include housing, transportation, work-force development, public safety, energy efficiency, \, neighborhood stabilization, water quality."

The city should have funding estimates in two to three weeks, but administrators have been "aggressive" in putting together potential project lists, Modica said.

For example, the Public Works Department has \$40 million in needed street repairs.

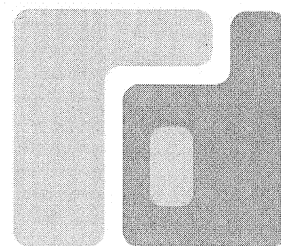
There is also a long list of infrastructure repairs, including curbs and gutters, drafted in accordance with last year's infrastructure ballot measure.

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"Cities are in a really unique position to move on projects quickly, and I think Long Beach is prepared because we just went through the process of reviewing our infrastructure," said Becki Ames, chief of staff to Mayor Bob Foster.

Ames said the city has at least \$57 million in identified infrastructure needs.

Expenditures for specific projects, such as fixing a stretch of roadway, would require City Council approval.

Stimulus funds are to be used for projects that are beyond the design phase and ready to go, those that Congress calls "shovel-ready."

"We are ready if we can get the funding for the projects," Ames said.

The city provided the U.S. Conference of Mayors, of which Foster is a member, with a wish list of potential projects, including roadwork and a solar-powered parking lot for the Long Beach Airport.

But that list was merely to be used as a list of examples for Congress to review. The stimulus bill does not include specific infrastructure projects.

Stimulus funding can travel down two streams - directly from the federal government to states and cities or in areas where projects compete for grants.

Individual residents can also qualify for

homebuying assistance, foreclosure help and income tax breaks.

Long Beach Transit

Long Beach Transit would expect to receive about \$18 million, spokeswoman Marcelle Epley said in an e-mail.

By law, these funds are to be used exclusively for capital projects, such as engines, bus-stop improvements and other projects that would create value for customers and, ultimately, support the national objectives and stimulate the local economy.

The estimated \$18 million cannot be used for daily operating expenses. Operating expenses have been affected by state budget shortfalls, which are the result of a Feb. 15 fare adjustment.

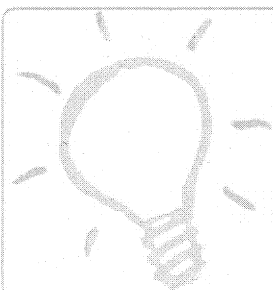
LBUSD package

Though approximate figures were not available for the city, the Long Beach Unified School District is set to receive \$31 million during each of the next two fiscal years as a result of the stimulus, said Kim Stallings, the district's chief business and financial officer.

It's possible that the LBUSD will get more money, depending on the share it receives from federal aid to California, he added.

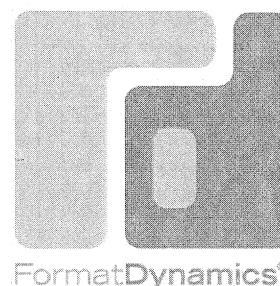
The district is facing a \$70 million budget deficit under Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget.

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Port of L.B. stimulus

Like the city, the port is looking for funds to jump-start a growing backlog of local infrastructure projects it says are needed to increase efficiency, enhance safety and clean up the environment.

Suffering from an increasingly dilapidated network of roads, bridges and terminals, port authorities are looking for more than \$1 billion from the stimulus package, though they concede competition will be fierce.

For the harbor, top priorities include replacement of the aging Gerald Desmond Bridge, deep-water dredging, on-dock rail improvements and roadway and intersection upgrades.

The projects, which total about \$1.2 billion, would create an estimated 1,400 full-time jobs in the next two years, with more than 1,000 of those jobs extending through 2016.

During trips to Washington, D.C., and in meetings with local congress members, the port has provided a list of more than a dozen projects able to break ground within the next year, said port spokesman Lee Peterson.

"We're going to be competing with a lot of agencies and on a lot of projects, but we have a comprehensive list we believe creates jobs - green jobs - and improves efficiency and infrastructure," said Samara Ashley, the port's director of government affairs.

The port is focusing on three portions of the \$787 billion package that provides about \$6.5 billion for highways, bridges, harbor dredging and diesel emission reductions.

Specifically, the stimulus plan approves \$1.5 billion in discretionary funding for highways and bridges, \$4.6 billion for civil works projects and another \$300 million to reduce diesel emissions, Ashley said.

Authorities will also go after money for freight rail upgrades, though the amount of that money in the stimulus plan remained unclear Friday.

The Southern California Association of Governments, which is lobbying for funding to extend a high-speed freight rail line connecting the ports with the Inland Empire, said federal investment in Southern California's transportation networks is long overdue.

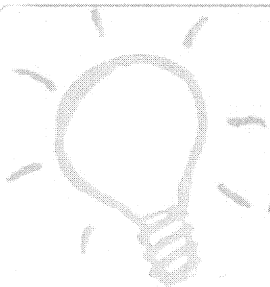
"It's an important step forward in providing an opportunity for freight projects to compete for funding, particularly in California which has not received the federal funding needed to keep pace with the growth in freight traffic," said Tim Spohn, who chairs the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority.

HIGHLIGHTS

PORT AREA WISH LIST

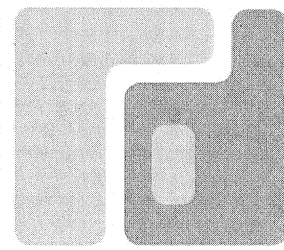
Gerald Desmond Bridge replacement: \$1.1 billion; 2,500 full-time jobs during six years of construction

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Main Channel dredging: \$55 million; 400 full-time jobs for two years

Pier G Railyard renovations: \$52 million; 420 full-time jobs for 2 years

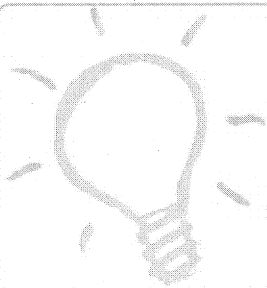
Pier G terminal and building improvements: \$117 million; 650 full-time jobs for 3 years

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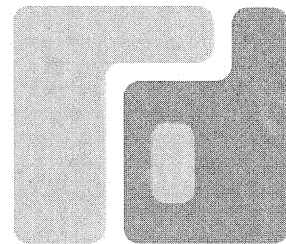
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